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SUBJECT: 17 GUINEAN MINISTERS IN MECCA FOR PILGRIMAGE

¶1. (U) The Guinean Government sent a delegation of 17 ministers, including the prime minister, on pilgrimage to Mecca this week. A western diplomat told the Charge that he had personally seen the group boarding two unidentified, private chartered airplanes at the national airport. A local internet news site (Guinee24.com) criticized the government for spending a significant sum of money to send the delegation when the state is suffering from a severe "financial crisis." The article speculates that the trip cost at least 340 million GnF (\$71,000) without taking per diem and other expenses into account. The author states that it is clear that current government officials are "filling their pockets as fast as they can before they are fired."

¶2. (SBU) A European Ambassador told the Charge on December 3 that President Conte was reportedly furious that half of his government had left the country. The Ambassador said that Prime Minister Square told Conte he would be leaving on pilgrimage, but did not indicate how many ministers would be accompanying him.

COMMENT

¶3. (U) It is unclear where the funding for the trip came from, but the government of Saudi Arabia may have provided the chartered airplanes and/or financial assistance to facilitate the delegation's pilgrimage. Guinee24 commented that it was unusual for such a large, high-level delegation to leave the country at the same time. END COMMENT.
RASPOLIC